

REMARKS

Favorable reconsideration and allowance of the present application is respectfully requested.

Claims 38-71 are currently pending, including independent claims 38, 54, 60, and 68. Independent claim 38, for instance, is directed to a method for joining substrates comprising providing a first substrate and second substrate having an upper surface and a lower surface. A continuous thermoplastic tape is positioned adjacent to the first substrate and the second substrate such that the tape is in operative communication with the upper and lower surfaces of the first substrate and with upper and lower surfaces of the second substrate. In one embodiment, for instance, such a configuration is accomplished by folding the thermoplastic tape into a z-shaped configuration. (See e.g., Appl. Figs. 3-5). A seam is formed by bonding the tape to the upper and lower surfaces of the first substrate and to the upper and lower surfaces of the second substrate.

In the Office Action, original independent claims 1, 22, and 29 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 4,410,575 to Obayashi, et al. Obayashi, et al. is directed to a lap welding method characterized in that a bonding tape is interposed between two end portions of a fabric or fabrics, and a high frequency wave treatment and/or heat treatment is applied to at least the interposed portion while pressing them. (Col 2, lines 37-52).

Applicants respectfully submit that Obayashi, et al. fails to disclose or suggest various limitations of present independent claims 38, 54, 60, and 68. For instance, independent claims 38, 54, 60, and 68 require that the seam be formed by bonding

(adhesive, physical, or combinations thereof) the tape to the upper and lower surfaces of the first substrate and to the upper and lower surfaces of the second substrate. In one embodiment, the tape is folded into a z-shaped configuration. (See e.g., Appl. Figs. 3-5). In this embodiment, as shown in Fig. 5, the "upper section" of the z-folded tape is bonded to the upper surface of the first substrate, while the "lower section" of the z-folded tape is bonded to the lower surface of the second substrate. The presence of such bonding can result in a seam having unexpected strength and durability.

In contrast, no such seam exists in Obayashi, et al. For instance, as shown in Fig. 4, Obayashi, et al. indicates that the "non-melted" side edge portions of the tape 11 form fin-shaped projections 12 and 13 extending from the "weld." When forces are applied to the welded portion, portions of the projections 12 absorb these forces, and deform as shown in Fig. 6. These projections 12 and 13 thus protect the "weld" from peeling. (Col 5, ll. 18-31). However, the projections 12 and 13 are not bonded to the fabric substrates to form the "weld" or seam. In fact, Obayashi, et al. suggests the opposite, noting that the projections are formed by "non-melted" portions that extend from the "weld." Thus, the projections do not form part of the "weld" or seam, but simply protect the "weld" from peeling. Accordingly, for at least the reasons set forth above, Applicants respectfully submit that independent claims 38, 54, 60, and 68 patentably define over Obayashi, et al.

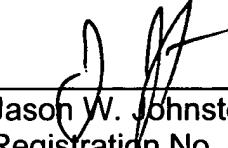
In addition, the above-cited reference was cited, either alone or in conjunction with U.S. Patent No. 5,003,902 to Benstock, et al., to reject certain of the original dependent claims. Applicants respectfully submit, however, that at least for the reasons indicated above relating to corresponding independent claims 38, 54, 60, and 68, the

present dependent claims patentably define over the reference(s) cited. However, Applicants also note that the patentability of such dependent claims does not necessarily hinge on the patentability of independent claims 38, 54, 60, and 68. In particular, some or all of these claims may possess features that are independently patentable, regardless of the patentability of claims 38, 54, 60, and 68.

In summary, Applicants respectfully submit that the present claims patentably define over all of the prior art of record for at least the reasons set forth above. As such, it is believed that the present application is in complete condition for allowance and favorable action, therefore, is respectfully requested. Examiner Rhee is invited and encouraged to telephone the undersigned, however, should any issues remain after consideration of this response.

Please charge any additional fees required by this Amendment to Deposit Account No. 04-1403.

Respectfully requested,
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